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ABSTRACT

Although there has been a paucity of research on what effective secondary school principals do, two recent studies offer some clues. A 1983 report by William Firestone and Bruce Wilson asserts that a high school principal may best be able to influence the school through bureaucratic and cultural linkages. Bureaucratic linkages are formal enduring arrangements within an organization that allow it to operate. Cultural linkages, the key to productivity in an organization, are the collectively accepted meanings, beliefs, values, and assumptions in the school. Researchers James Russell, Thomas White, and Steven Maurer, in a 1983 study, selected eight characteristics of effective schools and identified specific principal behaviors that appeared to foster these characteristics effectively. Spotlighted in this article are the effective and ineffective behaviors related to the two following effective schools characteristics: (1) schoolwide measurement and recognition of academic success and (2) an orderly and studious school environment. Researcher Kathleen Fitzpatrick is now introducing effective administrator behaviors as part of a training project in high schools in the Chicago, Illinois, area, and the response has been enthusiastic. Sixteen references are provided. (DCS)

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The Effective High School Principal: Sketches for A Portrait

by Jo Ann Mazzarella

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Most researchers agree that the role of the principal is essential to the success of a school. The effective schools research points again and again to the primacy of the principal's role in the creation of an outstanding school. As Ronald Edmonds once said, "There are some bad schools with good principals, but there are no good schools with bad principals."

Analysts like Pitner and Charters (1984) and Gersten and Carnine (1981) propose that many of the principal's duties as instructional leader could be performed just as well, or better, by others, yet the fact remains that in most schools there is no one but the principal both able and willing to perform these critical duties.

In spite of some writers' insistence that leadership of the principal is important, it is unclear exactly what this leadership consists of. What is it that principals do to improve their schools? Moreover, if what principals in general do to make their schools better is unclear, even more unclear are the functions of high school principals in particular. What does an effective secondary principal look like? This topic has been of great interest for a number of years among researchers affiliated with the Center for Educational Policy and Management.

After a brief review of what past research has to say about effective secondary principals, these pages contain an outline of theories and research that have emerged from CEPM in recent years on important ways that secondary principals can affect their schools. The result is a portrait, or more precisely, preliminary sketches for a portrait, of an effective high school principal.

Beginning with a Blank Canvas

According to a 1983 review by Mark Martinko, Gary Yukl, and Michele Marshall, "There is a deficiency in the literature with respect to a review of effective principal behaviors in secondary schools." Martinko, Yukl, and Marshall, in an exhaustive review of the literature done for a 1983 CEPM workshop, found that few studies of the principalship concentrated on secondary school principals or even differentiated between secondary and elementary principals. Yet such differentiation is necessary, the authors argue, because the principalship at the two levels is very different.

Citing a study done by Martinko and Gardner, the authors maintain that secondary principals spend more time in interactions with administrative staff; in mutually initiated

The author wishes to thank Mark Martinko, William Firestone, Bruce Wilson, and James Russell for their reading of early drafts of this article. To Susan Degen go special thanks for her scrupulous editing.

interactions; in activities related to staffing, decision making, and fiscal management; in management of relations with external entities; and in duties related to comptrolling than elementary principals do. Other studies they cite found that secondary principals have more duties associated with extracurricular activities, more interruptions, and more correspondence to handle than do elementary principals, while elementary principals spend more time with superiors and parents (Kmetz and Willower 1982, Martin and Willower 1981).

While Martinko, Yukl, and Marshall did uncover some findings related to the duties and behaviors of all secondary principals, they found little on *effective* secondary principals. They concluded that "no single set of behaviors, traits, or characteristics is clearly related to effective secondary school principal behavior."

These findings appear to be just as true today as they were in 1983 when Martinko, Yukl, and Marshall looked at the literature. In a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in April 1985, Daresh and Liu concluded that in research on the instructional role of the principal only limited attention has been given to high schools. In addition they found that little information has yet been uncovered regarding the *specific* behaviors of principals who serve as instructional leaders at *any* level.

In the view of Martinko, Yukl, and Marshall, effective leadership behavior is, in part, a function of the environment. They recommend "ethnoscience" as an approach to studying the secondary principal in order "to develop more specific understandings of how particular principals behave in their unique environments." They stress that "effective performance is the result of extremely complex relationships between leader behavior and environmental variables."

Influencing High Schools by Using Linkages

In the context of such sketchy information on the behavior of secondary school principals, researchers William Firestone and Bruce Wilson set out to examine how secondary principals influence the instructional work of their schools. In 1983 the authors, both researchers at Research for Better Schools in Philadelphia, put together a report on the topic for CEPM.

Firestone and Wilson ingeniously tie together the work of many diverse researchers to fashion a coherent theoretical paper maintaining that a high school principal may best be able to influence the school through bureaucratic and cultural linkages.

Firestone and Wilson ingeniously tie together the work of many diverse researchers, including their own, to fashion a coherent theoretical paper maintaining that a high school principal may best be able to influence the school through bureaucratic and cultural linkages.

Firestone and Wilson begin by setting forth Rosenblum and Louis's definition of linkages as "mechanisms in schools that coordinate the activities of people who work there." Bureaucratic linkages are those "formal enduring arrangements within an organization that allow it to operate," including roles, rules, procedures, and authority relationships. Such linkages control the behavior of organizational members.

Cultural linkages are less formal and less apparent to an outsider. Firestone and Wilson identify them as "publicly and collectively accepted meanings, beliefs, values, and assumptions in a school or other organization."

According to the authors, there is general consensus that individuals or activities in schools are "loosely coupled" or linked together. The authors report on several previous studies done in conjunction with their colleague R.E. Herriott, in which they concluded that both individuals and activities in secondary schools are more loosely linked both bureaucratically and culturally than are elementary schools. They found that each teacher in the secondary school independently makes major decisions about how to manage his or her students, how to present material, and even about what to teach. The principal must somehow influence the way teachers make these decisions in spite of weak linkages between principals and teachers.

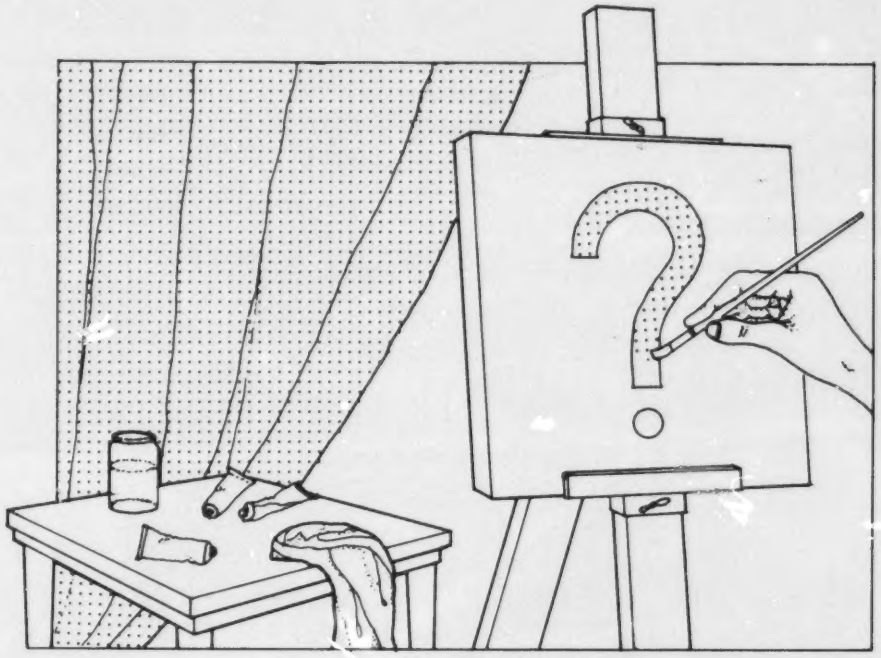
Bureaucratic Linkages

In spite of the fact that teacher supervision is often cited as an important bureaucratic linkage between principals and teachers, the authors dismiss it because it is utilized infrequently, has a low priority in schools, and usually lacks necessary followup. Instead, they go to the work of Bossert and his colleagues, who contend that there are some "crucial bureaucratic linkages" through which the principal can influence instruction. These are the control of teacher instructional time through setting schedules and minimizing classroom interruptions; the determination of class size and

makeup; and the assignment of students and teachers to particular groups or tracks. To this list Firestone and Wilson add two more. The first is allocation of resources (including money, new instructional materials, and facilities). The second is encouragement of both the acquisition and practice of new skills and knowledge by prompting teachers to use their untapped skills and urging them to attend training sessions. All of these activities can influence learning in the school.

Firestone and Wilson are careful to add, however, that such "crucial bureaucratic linkages" can also be strongly influenced by forces besides the principal. They mention district policies, state policies, court decisions, resource scarcity, and other staff as outside agents that can diminish a principal's control in all these areas (instructional time, class size and makeup, student and teacher assignment, resource allocation, and inservice education).

In the wake of the 1984 report by Goldschmidt, Bowers, Riley, and Stuart on "The Extent and Nature of Educational Policy Bargaining," one could almost certainly add the labor contract as yet another perhaps even stronger constraint on principals' decisions in these areas. Goldschmidt and his colleagues found that in many districts, many of these bureaucratic linkages (schedules, class size, resource allocation, inservice training) are tightly controlled by the collective bargaining agreement. Furthermore, they found that the influence of unions continued to increase steadily at least up to 1981, when their data were collected. These constraints cast some doubts on the principal's ability to take advantage of bureaucratic linkages, but they do not affect the principal's influence on the linkages that are at the heart of Firestone and Wilson's theories: cultural linkages.



Cultural Linkages

Cultural linkages, the collectively accepted meanings, beliefs, values, and assumptions in the school, are part of what the authors call the "key to productivity" in an organization. Focusing on these cultural linkages raises three questions:

1. What is the content of the culture that promotes successful instruction?
2. How is culture denoted? By what symbols?
3. How can the principal influence culture?

To answer the first question, Firestone and Wilson examined studies on the content of culture in successful business organizations. By distilling the findings from several studies, they determined that such cultures may have the following qualities in common:

- commitment to high quality service
- willingness to take risks
- a setting where individuals can experiment
- close ties to the outside world

Although they fully recognize that the components of successful teaching are missing from the list, Firestone and Wilson nevertheless suggest that these qualities might also describe part of the content of culture in successful high schools.

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How are the components of a culture expressed or denoted? How do we know what they are for any given culture? For this, Firestone and Wilson, like anthropologists observing a foreign culture, look to the symbols used to express the values and beliefs of the people being studied.

Symbols are found in stories, icons, and rituals. Stories, explain Firestone and Wilson, include myths and legends, as well as true accounts. Icons can be logos, mottoes, and trophies; in schools, rituals might be evidenced in assemblies, teacher or community meetings, and awards ceremonies.

After identifying cultural linkages in schools, Firestone and Wilson ask, "How can cultural linkages be influenced by the principal?" They suggest, first, that the principal can manage the flow of stories that communicate cultural content. From the work of Metz (1978), they offer an example of a principal who fostered a widely held belief that discipline problems at his school were usually easily manageable by patient, skillful teachers. This principal successfully countered the view then current that discipline problems were reflections of deep and perhaps unsolvable problems in the country as a whole by repeating stories of the skillful handling of discipline problems by teachers who were able to keep order and still avoid confrontation with students. During other periods of crisis in the school, this principal actually went so far as to suppress true stories of student walkouts or other incidents to minimize their disruptive effects. In addition, Firestone and Wilson suggest that principals can manipulate teaching schedules to facilitate or limit teacher communications. In these ways, principals shape and control the stories that communicate a school's cultural content.

Principals also are in a position to create icons and rituals, such as awards, mottoes, or academic pep assemblies. The authors even suggest that principals can become symbols themselves by, for instance, letting it be known that they worked their way up from a poor background.

Firestone and Wilson further suggest that principals, in their hundreds of short interactions with teachers, can be communicators of the values and beliefs that make up the common school culture. To fill this role well, they maintain, principals need high energy levels and a conscious commitment to the task.

The authors do not overstate the control that the principal has over cultural linkages. They emphasize that this control is inherently weak but can be exercised over and over again in the "countless interactions" principals engage in during the school year. As Firestone and Wilson put it, "the task for the principal is to consistently employ the full range of linkages through a multitude of major and minor actions to generate a common purpose and effect in the school."

Effective Behaviors

Taking another approach to creating a portrait of the effective secondary principal, researchers James Russell, Thomas White, and Steven Maurer have set out to depict not effective administrators but effective behaviors of high school principals. The behaviors they have focused on are those they believe contribute to the characteristics of effective schools.

Russell, White, and Maurer first reviewed the literature on organizational and school dynamics and the literature on school effectiveness. From the former they constructed a model of secondary school dynamics, and from the latter they gleaned characteristics of effective secondary schools. They integrated these characteristics into their model in a way that illustrates the general administrative processes (agenda setting, network building, and agenda implementing) that produce them and the effects and outcomes (student outcomes, teacher work, and school-wide effects) that they bring about.

Relying heavily on the analyses of Purkey and Smith, the authors selected from the literature on effective schools eight characteristics of effective schools that could be directly affected by principal behaviors:

1. School-wide measurement and recognition of academic success
2. An orderly and studious school environment
3. A high emphasis on curriculum articulation
4. Support for staff instructional tasks
5. High expectations and clear goals for the performance of students
6. Collaborative planning with staff
7. Instructional leadership for teachers
8. Parental support for the education of students

Working within the theoretical context of their model, the authors then set out to search for specific principal behaviors that appeared to be effective in fostering these characteristics. They wanted to find out very specifically what it is that principals might do to create effective schools. At the same time, they were interested in the opposite kinds of behaviors. What is it that principals do that is ineffective or even counterproductive? What weakens schools and makes them less effective?

To uncover these behaviors, Russell, White, and Maurer used the critical incident technique. They gave their list of characteristics of effective schools to a group of observers (including administrators, teachers, and students) who had a lot of experience in schools and asked these observers to name examples of effective and ineffective behaviors related to each characteristic that they had actually observed high school principals perform. The researchers defined effective behaviors as those that the observers wished all principals would perform under similar circumstances. Those behaviors that would make one doubt the competence of anyone who performed them repeatedly (or even once in some cases) they considered ineffective. The observers generated a list of 1,038 behaviors.

To verify all these behaviors, the researchers reclassified them by characteristic and by their effectiveness or ineffectiveness. To further ensure that the behaviors indeed logically fit under a particular characteristic, they were sorted once more by a panel of experts who judged once again which characteristics each behavior was related to and whether that behavior was effective or ineffective. When the process was completed, each behavior had been classified at least six and as many as seven separate times. When six of the experts and researchers agreed on a behavior's classification by characteristic and effectiveness, it was retained.

The Behaviors

The final result of the verification process was a list of 337 behaviors on which observers agreed very strongly. What were they? Obviously it is not possible to discuss or even list all 337 behaviors here. Instead, some of the most interesting will be mentioned to give an idea of the wealth of behaviors generated.

There were four general ways that principals were thought to promote "school-wide measurement and recognition of academic success": (1) undertaking unique or at least unusual efforts to recognize academic success; (2) setting up ongoing systems to recognize academic success; (3) encouraging the use of standardized testing; and (4) giving personal recognition to individual students for specific academic achievements.

One important way principals were seen to promote this characteristic was through efforts that are unusual or exceed those usually expected. Such efforts include bringing in outstanding speakers for the National Honor Society, displaying academic awards in the school trophy case, or attending a function of a local organization held to honor students. Displaying academic awards in the trophy case (and to a lesser extent all the above actions) is an excellent example of what Firestone and Wilson would call creating or manipulating the symbols that express the school's cultural linkages.

The second way to promote school-wide recognition of academic success, setting up ongoing systems to recognize success, includes such behaviors as arranging for regular publication of academic success stories in the community newspaper. Here again is an echo of Firestone and Wilson in that the principal controls the flow of "stories" that express school culture. Other such behaviors are arranging for an annual presentation of scholarship awards at Rotary Club meetings, or instituting an annual insert in the graduation program listing high achievers.

The third group of behaviors centers on the acceptance, usage, promotion, and dissemination of standardized testing data. This includes behaviors like convincing staff that general ability tests are important and encouraging standardized testing in each subject. This area represents an opportunity for principals to demonstrate that they place a high priority on academic success and that they believe the use of test data is an important way to promote academic success.

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The final cluster of behaviors, giving personal recognition to individuals for academic performance, includes such activities as personally presenting award certificates to students at the end of each grading period. Such behavior is yet another example of how principals can manipulate awards, which are expressions of the school's cultural linkages, according to Firestone and Wilson.

There were only nine behaviors recognized as particularly ineffective in promoting the characteristic of school-wide recognition of academic success. (It should be remembered that for Russell, White, and Maurer "ineffective" means something more harmful than the usual meaning connotes.) These behaviors are divided into two categories: mishandling student recognition and ignoring or misusing standardized tests. Among examples of the first category are displaying uncertainty during an award ceremony about how an award was achieved or refusing to recognize outstanding academic performance because of a belief that high achievers are "no better than anyone else." Examples of the second category are ignoring standardized test results because of a belief that they "don't predict," or even having no testing program at all. The ineffective behaviors are virtually the opposite of those behaviors listed as effective in two of the other categories identified under this characteristic.

Promoting Order

The second characteristic of an effective school in the researchers' list, "promoting an orderly and studious school environment," is surely one of the most important to fostering high student achievement. Of the four general groups of behaviors seen as promoting this characteristic, the largest contained those associated with the principal becoming personally involved in student discipline. These behaviors included such actions as personally presenting rules at an orientation convocation, personally confronting students who are "goofing off" in a study hall, and being frequently visible in all parts of the high school campus.

Other behaviors believed to promote an orderly school environment are those that establish or enforce a clear code of conduct. These would include using a microcomputer to tabulate and report attendance for each class period or creating a few comprehensive, easily understood rules.

This list offers, for the first time perhaps, a suggestion of the many specific and concrete behaviors that are performed by that elusive being, the effective high school principal.

Several more behaviors deal with the support of disciplinary policies or actions. Making suspensions "stick" or providing a suspension room are ways that principals can provide disciplinary back-up.

It is not enough, however, to establish, enforce, and support a discipline system. Important behaviors were identified that had to do with organizing staff and resources to implement the discipline policy. These behaviors include calling in police when necessary, designating counselors for problem students, and assigning staff to problem areas.

The sixteen ineffective behaviors the researchers identified could be roughly divided into four general groups: (1) permitting behavior that creates a disorderly environment and disrupts classroom time, (2) enforcing discipline in a weak or inappropriate manner, (3) failing to establish or enforce a clear code of attendance and absence policies, and (4) being unwilling to enforce discipline.

Those principal behaviors deemed ineffective appeared to be not only different from but directly opposite to behaviors the researchers considered effective. The most numerous behaviors were those that allowed disruptive behavior to go undisciplined, such as excusing students to go shopping or allowing students to write graffiti on walls. Only one of the permitted behaviors violated an actual rule or policy (swearing at a teacher), but the rest offended the sensibilities of the observers, researchers, and experts. There appeared to be a shared recognition among them that it is ineffective for principals to permit certain behaviors that, although not officially designated as misbehaviors, seem clearly undesirable.

The behaviors summarized by enforcing discipline weakly or inappropriately include not expelling frequently suspended students or saying merely "Nobody talks like that," when a student uses a four-letter word.

Such actions as developing a code of conduct that is nothing more than a laundry list of "dos" and "don'ts" and claiming a rule exists that does not, indicate failure to establish a clear code of conduct. Neglecting to establish behavioral norms in the minds of students and staff appears to be ineffective.

The final type of behavior ineffective for promoting school order is the unwillingness of principals to enforce discipline. Behaviors that were identified here include walking out of unruly assemblies or disregarding

rowdy students in a lunchroom. It appears ineffective for principals to avoid confronting misbehavior.

These examples from the researchers' extensive list of behaviors merely suggest the myriad of behaviors observers linked to the characteristics of an effective high school. Because the authors consider this a pilot study, they did not make an attempt to correlate each behavior with the achievement levels of the high schools in which they occurred. One hopes that they will choose to carry the study one step further by pursuing this line of inquiry. Until then, however, this list of behaviors is an important contribution to school effectiveness research. It offers, for the first time perhaps, a suggestion of the many specific and concrete behaviors that are performed by that elusive being, the effective high school principal.

Teaching Principals Effective Behaviors

Researcher Kathleen Fitzpatrick is now introducing effective administrator behaviors as part of a training project she is undertaking in high schools in six suburban Chicago-area districts. One of the major thrusts of Fitzpatrick's project is training teachers in mastery learning techniques. In a related session she teaches high school principals and other building administrators ways they can help their teachers implement the new techniques through administrative support functions drawn from the literature on effective schools.

In particular, Fitzpatrick highlights these characteristics of effective schools: instructional leadership, particularly the component of evaluative feedback (Russell and colleagues' characteristic 7), and cooperative work and planning by teachers (Russell and colleagues' characteristics 4 and 6). Fitzpatrick makes the participating principals aware of structures that can be set up in the school to promote collegial teamwork, such as providing opportunities for teachers to meet during the day and allowing sufficient time for planning courses. She also emphasizes the importance of giving sincere feedback to teachers and how to do this. Not just a lecture, Fitzpatrick's session includes role playing of the behaviors involved and a lot of time for discussion. Response to Fitzpatrick's program from administrators has been enthusiastic. Many have requested a continuation of the training sessions through the summer, and two districts have highlighted the program in presentations to their school boards.

Researcher Kathleen Fitzpatrick is now introducing effective administrator behaviors as part of a training project she is undertaking in high schools in six suburban Chicago-area districts.

Conclusion

These pages are an attempt to outline the portrait of an effective secondary principal. We began with highlights from a research review on the topic by Martinko, Yukl, and Marshall, but because previous research was found to offer little in the way of a likeness, we began with a canvas that was virtually empty.

We then examined two different ways of looking at the high school principalship. By examining cultural and bureaucratic linkages in the school, Firestone and Wilson built an intriguing and persuasive case for the notion that effective administrators might be those who try to influence such linkages, particularly the cultural ones. In contrast, Russell, White, and Maurer created a model of secondary school functioning and then used observations of experts to create a long list of specific and concrete principal behaviors that observers linked to school effectiveness. Finally, we touched on a CEPM-sponsored program in which trainers attempt to familiarize principals with some of the important functions of effective secondary administrators.

The result is not so much a completed portrait but a series of working sketches for a portrait of an effective high school principal. The antithesis of a still life or the usual static portrait, each sketch in this series is lively, full of motion, film-like in its depiction of action. It is not what high school principals *are* but what they *do* that is of interest here and that will continue to be of interest. For what high school principals do now and in the near future will be a powerful influence over whether we have a nation of effective or ineffective secondary schools.

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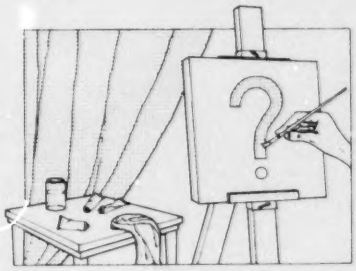

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